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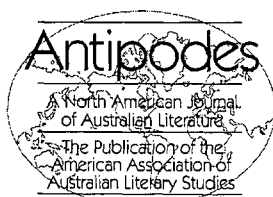
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About the Cover

Dennis Nicholson

Dennis Nicholson (1951–2000) was an artist, poet and photographer from Melbourne. Uniquely gifted, he was self-trained as a visual artist and pursued resolutely his own independent artistic vision. Although he had no use for labels, his work might best be described as an example of what the French call *Art Brut*, after Jean Dubuffet; that is, art that resists the conventional values and forms of the Fine Art world. In Dubuffet's words, *Art Brut* refers to "works executed by persons unharmed by artistic culture, in which mimesis, in contrast to what happens in the case of intellectuals, has little or no part at all. Consequently, the authors draw their inspiration (themes, materials, the means of transposition, rhythm, different styles of writing, etc.) from their resources and not from the clichés of classical or fashionable art."

Nicholson worked in pen and pencil on ordinary paper and used colored pencils rather than watercolors or paint. His designs seem to grow organically in unpredictable ways and are always filled with multiple and shifting perspectives. A favorite technique is to use abstract patterns to construct human and non-human faces that emerge upon closer inspection. At first glimpse his drawings often appear as flat designs, but then perspectives come into view and three-dimensional worlds open onto other worlds. There is something fantastical or phantasmagoric about these constructions. They can be dark and disturbing, wry and funny, peculiar, charming, droll—and sometimes all these together in a single drawing. But the dominant feeling, taken altogether, is of compassion for the difficulty and suffering that attends human life. In Nicholson's drawings we are brought face-to-face with innumerable faces looking back at us. There is an "ethics of the face" here that could be glossed by the philosopher Immanuel Levinas, who writes that "The face at the limit of holiness and caricature is thus still in a sense exposed to powers." The vulnerability of the face calls to us to respond with goodness and responsibility—which, as Levinas holds, in turn promotes our own freedom. This interplay between bondage and freedom is everywhere evident in Nicholson's work, including his poetry. In "Hindsight," the final poem of his (still unpublished) book, *The Fabled Now*, he uses unfashionable rhymed couplets in iambic measures to capture the impossibly fleeting reality of self and other in the space/time continuum we call our world:

I identify you with my sight
by your peculiarly reflected light;
though in the time it took
you're older than you look—
12 million miles a minute older
than in the eye of the beholder.
But since this moment is like all the rest unique—
despite that I am ancient history as I speak—
undoubtedly we're bound to meet again
for after all eternity is now as well as then.

Dennis Nicholson was a longtime supporter of *Antipodes*, contributing poems, reviews and now a cover. His work awaits its audience.